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INFO RUEHXR/RWANDA COLLECTIVE

RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE

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UNCLAS KINSHASA 000980

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV KDEM KPAO PREL PHUM CG

SUBJECT: MEDIA MINISTER MEETS WITH RFI REPS TO DISCUSS  
TO DISCUSS AUTHORIZATION TO BROADCASTING IN DRC

REF: (A) Kinshasa 426; (B) Kinshasa 448;  
(C) Kinshasa 854, (D) Kinshasa 890;  
(E) Kinshasa 969

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

NOFORN

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Following the July 26 shutdown of Radio France International's (RFI) signal throughout the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) as a result of controversial reports by an RFI journalist (see refs a and b), French diplomats and representatives of RFI have met with GDRC officials in recent days to resolve the dispute and re-establish the broadcast signal. The latest meeting shows some signs of progress, and a planned meeting between the president of RFI and DRC President Joseph Kabila, might possibly break the impasse. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On October 27, PDO spoke with a French Embassy Official concerning the October 21 and 23 meetings between RFI representative Jean-Karim Fall and the Minister of Media and Information Lambert Mende. While not a participant in the meetings, our contact was fully briefed by a colleague who was present. The atmosphere was described as "not very friendly, but neither was it very tense." Mende was still upset about the reporting of RFI correspondent Ghislaine Dupont (expelled by the GDRC for a history of criticism of the Kabila government), complaining of her biased reports and talking of a "conspiracy" between her and unnamed others to undermine the armed forces' (FARDC) morale and hinder efforts against rebel groups in the Eastern DRC (see refs c and d). As in previous discussions on this issue, Mende insisted that RFI remove Dupont. Fall said RFI could not dismiss a journalist at the request of a government official.

¶3. (SBU) While discussing the terms for re-establishing the RFI signal, Mende insisted on credentials authorization under the military code of justice, as he has with other international journalists (ref E). Fall said that RFI could not accept an open-ended agreement on those terms, since the DRC is not a country in a permanent state of war. Fall particularly objected to a clause in the accreditation letter that forbids journalists from reporting information that might "demoralize" the FARDC and make them act contrary to their duties. He said they might be able to agree to such terms on a temporary basis, leaving open the possibility that accreditation terms and legal authority over journalists might be the subjects of future negotiations.

¶4. (SBU) Another issue under discussion was the establishment of a Kinshasa office of RFI, which would serve as both headquarters for an RFI reporter covering the DRC and a regional bureau for the broadcaster. Both parties seemed to be in agreement in theory over the establishment of an RFI bureau in Kinshasa, but have yet to settle the details. A higher ranking RFI official (probably the president of French overseas broadcasting, Christine Okrent) will visit Kinshasa for future negotiations. This next round of meetings would be with President Kabila himself, at a date yet to be

determined. French diplomats considered the recent meetings to have been constructive, and are guardedly hopeful that the meetings with Kabila will resolve the impasse between RFI and the GDRC.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: While progress may have been made toward re-establishing RFI's signal, such progress comes at great cost to re-establishing RFI's signal, such progress comes at great cost to press freedom: it would have to agree to terms that would make it difficult to even report from conflict zones in the eastern DRC. Minister Mende has made clear to international journalists (ref e) that his definition of what news reports are "demoralizing" to the FARDC is broadly-based and could result in journalists being subjected to criminal charges. While the restoration of RFI's signal would certainly be a step forward in terms of press freedom, and a welcome improvement to the DRC's media environment, the cost is too high. End comment.

GARVELINK